



Society for Conservation Biology

RELIGION AND CONSERVATION BIOLOGY

Working Group

<http://www.conbio.org/workinggroups/Religion/>

Buddhism and Conservation Fact Sheet

Religion and background

Buddhism was founded in 550 BC in Northern India by Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as Buddha. He developed a philosophy of how to end suffering through personal enlightenment. Four Noble Truths lead a person to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, which includes right understanding and intention, taking responsibility for one's actions through right conduct, and right schooling of the heart through meditation. Buddhism, which has no central organization, can be categorized into two main branches. Theravada Buddhism is not theistic, but Mahayana Buddhism (found in various forms throughout Asia) incorporates deities, including the Buddha himself.

Religion in relation to environment

Reincarnation and Karma are two important tenets of Buddhism. Reincarnation affirms the belief that all life has value, whether human, animal, vegetable or mineral. Thus, respect for all life is inherent to the Buddhist philosophy, and recognition of the interdependence of all life forms promotes compassion. Buddhists believe in the principle of Karma that states that "every cause has an effect." With this view of the world one is prompted to care about the impacts of one's actions on all that surrounds them, including the environment.

Five Precepts guide the Buddhist along the path of enlightenment. Three of these can apply directly to conservation: Do not harm any living creature; Do not take more than you need; and Do not act thoughtlessly.

"The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees, and the earth. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise . . . then we can build a noble environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we shall perish." - Buddhadasa Bhikkhu
(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/buddhism/index.html>)

"As a bee gathering nectar does not harm or disturb the colour and fragrance of the flower; so do the wise move through the world." –Saying of the Buddha, *Dhammapada*: Flowers, verse 49

"The Buddha commended frugality as a virtue in its own right. Skillful living avoids waste and we should try to recycle as much as we can. Buddhism advocates a simple, gentle, nonaggressive attitude toward nature—reverence for all forms of nature must be cultivated." from Buddhist Faith Statement prepared for Alliance of Religion and Ecology
(<http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=66>)

"We need to live as the Buddha taught us to live, in peace and harmony with nature, but this must start with ourselves. If we are going to save this planet we need to seek a new ecological order, to look at the life we lead and then work together for the benefit of all; unless we work together no solution can be found. By moving away from self-centeredness, sharing wealth more, being more responsible for ourselves, and agreeing to live more simply, we can help decrease much of the suffering in the world," from the Buddhist Statement on Ecology 1996.

"Many of the earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects and even micro-organisms that we know as rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability and the responsibility. We must



act before it is too late.”-Dalai Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism
(<http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=64>)

Examples of religious leaders in conservation

- Ogyen Drodul Trinley Dorje, the 17th Karmapa, hosted the first Conference on Environmental Protection for Kagyu Monasteries and Centres in March, 2009. The Karmapa also plans to publish “108 Things to Protect the Environment.”
<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=308>
- Phrakhru Pitak Nanthakun, Phrakhru Manas Natheepitak, Phrakhru Prajak Kuttajitto, and other monks in Thailand known informally as ecology monks (*phra nak anuraksa*) are addressing environmental issues as part of their ministry.
http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/buddhism/projects/thai_ecology.html
- International Network of Engaged Buddhists, founded by Sulak Sivaraksa;
<http://www.sulak-sivaraksa.org/en/>
- Earth Sangha; <http://www.earthsangha.org/>
- Friends of the Western Buddhist Order has developed a code of Buddhist eco-practice.
<http://www.ecopractice.fwbo.org/>
- Mlup Baitong Buddhism and Environment Program <http://www.mlup.org/>

Examples of conservation projects aided by religion

- In late 2005, the Dalai Lama called on the Tibetans to stop using animal skins, such as tiger and leopard, for clothing. Thousands of Tibetans quickly responded by burning their animal skins in token of banning animal skin clothing.
<http://www.dalailama.com/news.30.htm>
- In 2007, local monks of Russei Chrum in Cambodia teamed with Conservation International to educate local people about the links between their environment and Buddhist teachings.
<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=180>
- Thrangu Rinpoche has encouraged Buddhists to pray to help reverse global warming. He indicated that the act of praying will slowly change the minds of the people, who will become more aware of their actions and those will change as well. Thus, through prayer they will become a part of the solution to global warming.
<http://www.ecobuddhism.org/video.php?id=1>
- At Wat Plak Mai Lai, a forest monastery in Thailand, Abbot Phra Acharn Somneuk Natho has used a hands-off approach to reforestation and local involvement to restore the forest on the temple site.
http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/buddhism/projects/wat_plak.html

For more information, see Alliance of Religions and Conservation (www.arcworld.org), the Forum on Religion and Ecology (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/main.html>), and Green Dharma (http://www.traditionalyogastudies.com/green_dharma.html).

